



Preface: The trajectory from volume to journal

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History of the AAUSC and its Annual Volume

At a time when the American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) and the Second Language Research Forum (SLRF) were relatively new, both having been created in 1977, the [American Association of University Supervisors, Coordinators, and Directors of Language Programs](#) (AAUSC) was officially formed in 1980. The AAUSC looked to achieve four main goals:

1. to improve language instruction;
2. to improve language teacher education;
3. to promote research in second language learning and teaching; and
4. to professionalize the status of language program supervisors and coordinators.

It was some years later that the title *language program director* (LPD) began to replace the titles *supervisor* and *coordinator*, and more colleagues working primarily in second language learning and teaching assumed this role. They began overseeing entire programs (and sometimes multiple languages), instead of specific courses, and brought their scholarly background and ongoing research interests into the department's language learning and teaching enterprise. Although the AAUSC acronym remained unchanged (figuring it was long enough!), the organization's name was expanded to include the notion of *directors*: The American Association of University Supervisors, Coordinators, and Directors of Language Programs.

In personal terms, Charles James recounted the origins of the AAUSC and the idea of its annual volume series:

The story got started back in 1979, when the Goethe Institute [GI] in Chicago invited TA supervisors in German departments to a workshop in the GI headquarters on Michigan Avenue north of the river; it's located south of the river now. Three names come to mind spontaneously from that first meeting: Cathy Harms (Northwestern), Bob DiDonato (University of Wisconsin-Madison), and Dieter Jedan (Southeast Missouri State). I was at the University of Illinois at Chicago at the time. It was Dieter who said that we needed to expand our contacts beyond German to all languages. Apparently, he approached Wilga Rivers (Harvard) ACTFL that November who immediately saw the value in Dieter's proposal and made contacts with many of her colleagues, mostly in French, but with connections to other language programs. The result was the creation of the national AAUSC at ACTFL in Boston in 1980. The second thing that Dieter not only suggested, but almost insisted on, was the creation of a refereed journal or volume which would legitimize the work that TA supervisors did and do. Skip ahead ten years, then thirty, and the rest is history, bringing us to the inception of the online journal in 2020.

At first, the French and Spanish language coordinators met yearly at department chairs' meetings of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (now the Big Ten Academic Alliance), while German coordinators continued meeting at the Goethe Institute. As the AAUSC moved to national meetings, it expanded to include LPDs of less-commonly-taught languages. There are now eight language sections, each headed by a convener: Arabic, Asian, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Slavic, and Spanish. From the beginning, it was intended that the office of president should rotate among different languages; the president and vice-president therefore could not come from the same language section. In the late 1980s, Sally Magnan, an LPD in French and one of the early presidents of the AAUSC, decided to act on Jedan's suggestion to create a new journal. At the time, Heinle & Heinle was an up-and-coming publishing company with substantial interest, and success, in college-level second language instruction. With encouragement from many AAUSC members, Magnan approached Charles Heinle and publisher Stan Galek about an annual volume that would offer LPDs and other scholars interested in college-level language learning a venue beyond what was already available in the profession's journals. The hope was that an AAUSC annual volume would offer collections of articles on topics of relevance to undergraduate foreign language teaching as well as provide spaces for young scholars, writing on their own or mentored by senior colleagues. An additional goal, as critical as the first, was to provide greater visibility and legitimacy to the enterprise of language program direction, by linking its administrative role to research situated more firmly in the field of applied linguistics.

In 1990, the series *Issues in Language Program Direction* was launched with Magnan as series editor, Charles James as managing editor, and a 12-member editorial board. Magnan also served as editor for the first volume, *Challenges in the 1990s for College Foreign Language Programs*. That first volume contained 11 articles, authored or co-authored by well-established scholars who held the ranks of full and associate professor, as well as several assistant professors and one graduate student. Most notably, it contained a bibliography of published scholarship on the preparation and support of graduate teaching assistants in foreign languages, compiled by David Benseler and Christine Cronjaeger. This bibliography included 407 entries from a wide variety of sources and associated disciplines. The entries date back to 1944, with progressively increasing numbers from 1963 onward, including articles especially from the *Modern Language Journal* and *Foreign Language Annals*. This bibliography attests to the long history of work in university-level language learning and teaching assistant development, while it also, importantly, reveals that no source dedicated solely to the LPD enterprise existed before the creation of the AAUSC volume series.

Heinle & Heinle mailed the first volume gratis to a long list of LPDs and distributed it at the 1990 ACTFL meeting, marking the 10th anniversary of the creation of the AAUSC organization. Subsequently, the volume was sold by Thomson Heinle (now Cengage Learning). Over the next 30 years, the volume became a key source for collective research-supported wisdom about language learning and teaching. It is widely cited in tenure letters for emerging scholars, meeting its initial goals of disseminating knowledge and contributing to the professionalization and recognition of the discipline within the field of applied linguistics.

The original goals of the series, as Magnan described in the introduction to the first volume (1990, vii-xi), remained unchanged over the 30 years of its publication. They focused on the connection between theory and practice:

In accordance with the mission of AAUSC, these annual volumes aim to foster scholarship and research in postsecondary foreign language learning and teaching. Through the dialogue provided in these volumes, AAUSC hopes to contribute to the development of language acquisition theory and to the improvement of undergraduate curricula and methodological preparation of teaching assistants. (vii)

Magnan explained that: "The language program director...fulfills two key functions in most departments: designing and implementing basic curriculum for undergraduates and preparing teaching assistants for their future professional careers" and that "the main purpose of this series is to encourage cooperative research

and scholarship and program innovation” (viii).

Challenges for the Annual Volume

The goal of “encourag[ing] cooperative research and scholarship and program innovation” (Magnan, 1990, viii) brought its own challenges, mainly because the members of the AAUSC were such a diverse group. For example, based on a survey conducted with members of the AAUSC, Katz and Watzinger-Tharp (2005) suggested that many colleagues working as LPDs were uncomfortable calling themselves applied linguists, due to the fact that their academic training and research agendas lay outside that field. The AAUSC’s commitment to inclusiveness, however, helped foster a sense of belonging and community for those who may have felt on the margins of program coordination or applied linguistics. The AAUSC website’s call for membership has not changed over the past several decades: “Membership in the AAUSC is open to anyone who is interested in strengthening foreign and second language instruction—especially, but not exclusively, those involved with multi-section programs. The membership includes teachers, supervisors, coordinators, program directors, faculty, and administrators in colleges and universities that employ teaching assistants, and many members are faculty and administrators at undergraduate institutions” (AAUSC, 2019). The volume required its contributors to engage deeply and rigorously with research and to produce scholarship that was applicable to programs and accessible to LPDs coming from various backgrounds.

The organizational structure of the annual volume series was composed of a series editor (who also eventually assumed the role of managing editor, along with the publisher), volume editor, and editorial board. The volume had five series editors: Sally Sieloff Magnan (1990-2006), Carl Blyth (2007-2011), Stacey Katz Bourns (2012-2017), and Johanna Watzinger-Tharp and Kate Paesani (2018-2019). Through each editor, the series sought to represent the particular needs and concerns of the AAUSC organization. One of the biggest challenges was to make sure that the volume spoke to its intended audience: those mentoring TAs and overseeing language programs. The editors did not want the volume to replicate the mission of other journals in the field of applied linguistics. As such, the series editors chose topics that promoted these linkages. That said, the volume and series editors often had to ask contributors to rework their submissions so that their articles made explicit ties to language program direction. Although some volume topics were more easily perceived as relevant to language program direction (such as grammar or vocabulary instruction), others needed to be more clearly reformulated (such as critical theory).

Other challenges were more mundane, but crucially important. As digital access grew in the profession, the AAUSC needed the volume’s articles digitized and indexed into databases. Despite on-going problems with inclusion in databases, the volume was cited widely, especially among LPDs, attesting to its continued relevance. Of course, as financial issues loomed in academia, there was also the need to convince the publisher that the volume was worth its expense and to negotiate the number of pages allowable each year. Early in the organization’s history, the AAUSC dues were set to include the annual volume so that it was mailed yearly to members. Fortunately, the AAUSC organization has recently come to an agreement with Cengage that all past volumes will remain available digitally, free of charge, on the new journal’s website.

Not only did the volume contribute to the development of thoughtfully advocated, research-supported classroom practices and curricular innovation, but it also now serves as a record of the progress in the field. Reflecting the themes and issues that have shaped the disciplines of applied linguistics and foreign language pedagogy over the past three decades, it frames the ways that theory and practice align today in both research and in classrooms. It has also contributed to the scholarly validation of the LPD role. In 2000 Kramsch attested that

an increasing number of language program coordinators have degrees in various domains of Applied Linguistics, occupy tenure track positions, and are granted tenure in those fields, even though their academic and intellectual legitimacy still has to be argued in comparison with that of colleagues in literary/cultural studies or in theoretical linguistics. (p. 320)

The success of the volume, as well as the growth of the AAUSC organization, whose membership remains robust today, reflect a broader appreciation of the contributions of applied linguists to departments and to the fields of language pedagogy and curriculum development. Over the past dozen years, however, beginning with the recession of 2008 and culminating in the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the profession—and the volume—have faced new challenges that surpass what anyone could have imagined. The sudden move to remote teaching has increased the workload for many LPDs who have been asked to create brand new digital materials and online pedagogies with little preparation and few resources. Moreover, the pandemic has disrupted familiar work and home routines. For example, many language instructors face the enormous challenge of maintaining their work productivity while meeting new demands for child care.

Rationale and Goals for the New AAUSC Journal

Due to the continued difficulty of ensuring that volume articles appear in digital search engines and thus be accessible to scholars beyond the AAUSC, starting around 2010, the editorial board began discussing the affordances of digital, open-access publishing. It became clear that the original goal of the AAUSC series—to encourage cooperative research and promote the development of LPD scholars—could be enhanced through an open-format, digital presence with wider dissemination than direct mail to members and availability on the AAUSC website. With digital access also comes greater readability and ease of academic use, all of which foster the AAUSC's goal of facilitating and promoting scholarship. It also promotes a faster publication schedule to take advantage of the quickly changing field and world events.

Some board members were concerned that the move to a digital publication would affect the academic standing of what had always been a print publication, and they lamented the loss of the colorful paperback volumes that many AAUSC colleagues collected and proudly displayed in their offices. Others pointed out that many high-quality, peer-reviewed journals were moving entirely online and that the open-access movement was gaining momentum. In addition, some board members felt that continuing to publish a volume with a textbook publisher might not adequately reflect the prestige that the organization wanted the volume to enjoy, and that continuing to proceed in this manner was impeding the volume's dissemination. Indeed, the AAUSC trajectory from print to digital mirrors that of academic publishing generally.

Having made the decision to move to a digital format, the editorial board felt that changing from a thematic annual volume to a journal, peer reviewed like the volume, would allow more flexibility in topics, as well as length and genres of submissions. It would also open the possibility for distinct sections and, to recall the volume, special issues on occasion, while allowing more room for greater author participation.

After the series editors explored several academic publishers as well as various university presses, the Editorial Board voted in favor of a collaborative arrangement to publish a journal with the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawai'i. In addition, the journal partners with five nationally recognized centers dedicated to the study of languages, teacher education, and research: [CARLA](#) at the University of Minnesota, [CERCLL](#) at the University of Arizona, [COERLL](#) at the University of Texas at Austin, [L2TReC](#) at the University of Utah, and [OLRC](#) at the University of Kansas.

The new AAUSC journal, *Second Language Research & Practice* (SLRP), and the AAUSC organization, will continue to play an important role in supporting university language learning and fostering the scholarship that underlies it. Despite the 2007 MLA Report's call for more tenure-track positions for LPDs, the number of such jobs has been significantly reduced in favor of lectureships in recent years. Even more alarming today is that entire programs are being shuttered, and students are not continuing on to the upper levels of language study as they once were, related, no doubt, to the trimming or elimination of these upper-level programs (Looney & Lusin, 2019). University budgets, especially in the humanities, are hurting. With the current 2020 pandemic, we are already hearing about further budget reductions and bracing for their impact on language programs.

It is our hope that the new AAUSC journal will continue the tradition of three decades of the AAUSC

volume as an important venue for intellectual exchange that stimulates language program innovation. Our profession, like academia generally, faces great challenges, to be sure, but the contributions of LPDs to universities' missions are more relevant than ever before in today's globalized and mediatized context. *Second Language Research & Practice* will continue to provide LPDs with a scholarly space in which they can add their voices to vital conversations moving forward.

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